

Message Text

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AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

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SUBJECT: WEST GERMAN UNEASINESS ABOUT FUTURE U.S.
WORLD ROLE

BEGIN SUMMARY: WEST GERMAN UNEASINESS ABOUT DEVELOP-
MENTS IN WASHINGTON, WEAKENING AMERICA'S WILL AND ABIL-
ITY TO ACT AS LEADER OF THE WESTERN WORLD, HAS BECOME
A MAJOR TOPIC IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. A NUMBER OF
WEST GERMAN NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN
ABOUT THE SITUATION, PARTICULARLY US INACTION IN ANGOLA.
PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH POLITICIANS IN ALL THREE
MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, OPINION
LEADERS, AND PLAIN CITIZENS REFLECT A FEELING OF UNEASI-
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NESS ABOUT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US. CONTRIBUT-

ING TO GERMAN DOUBTS ARE THE HOSTILE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESS, APPARENT AMERICAN AVERSION TO ANY US INTERVENTION ABROAD, AND THE DAILY REVELATION IN THE US MEDIA OF NEW "SCANDALS," OFTEN WITH INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS. SOME WEST GERMAN POLITICIANS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT GIVEN THE PRESENT CLIMATE IN WASHINGTON, IT MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE US GOVERNMENT TO KEEP ANY SECRETS. SO FAR POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN MORE SUBDUED IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS THAN IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. HOWEVER, OVER THE LONG RUN, AN EROSION OF WEST GERMAN CONFIDENCE IN AMERICA'S ABILITY TO LEAD THE ALLIANCE WOULD HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR FRG POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF RECENT EDITORIALS EXPRESSING DISMAY ABOUT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US WHICH HINDER THE US GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO CONDUCT AN EFFECTIVE FOREIGN POLICY. THE HIGHLY RESPECTED, CDU-ORIENTED "FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG" HAD AN EDITORIAL FEB. 19, EXPRESSING DISMAY: "...EUROPE'S MOST IMPORTANT PARTNER IS ABOUT TO DESTROY HIS OWN STRENGTH. IN A MOOD OF PURISM COMING CLOSE TO POLITICAL INSANITY, CONGRESS KEEPS SURPRISING THE WORLD WITH DISCLOSURES. CIA AND LOCKHEED HAVE BECOME NEW WATERGATES. IN AN ATTEMPT AT PREVENTING ANOTHER VIETNAM, THE (AMERICAN) GIANT REACTED LIKE A DWARF IN ANGOLA." THE WEEKLY INTELLECTUAL JOURNAL "DIE ZEIT" WHICH IS MORE PRO-GOVERNMENT ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT US POLICY TOWARD ANGOLA: "SHOCKED BY VIETNAM AND WATERGATE, THE WASHINGTON CONGRESS PENITENTLY ACCEPTED THE SLAP IN THE FACE IN ANGOLA. AMERICA CANNOT AND WILL NOT ACT AS WORLD POLICEMAN ANY MORE. BUT CAN IT AFFORD KEEPING SILENT IN VIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN AFRICA THAT REDUCE ANY POLICY OF DETENTE AND ANY CONTAINMENT PHILOSOPHY TO IDLE TALK?" OTHER NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO REFLECTED THESE SENTIMENTS.

2. DISMAY ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN WASHINGTON, INCLUDING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES OF THE US GOVERNMENT, THE DAILY EXPOSES IN THE US MEDIA, WHICH OFTEN HAVE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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(E.G., CIA, LOCKHEED, ETC.), AND A BELIEF THAT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WILL NOT SUPPORT FUTURE US INTERVENTION IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES, NO MATTER HOW VALID THE REASONS, ARE ALSO REFLECTED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH POLITICIANS IN BONN AND THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

3. MOST GERMAN POLITICIANS, EVEN THOSE WHO ARE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED ABOUT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US,

HAVE NEVER FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE "WATERGATE" PHENOMENON.
MANY, ESPECIALLY ON THE CENTER-LEFT OF THE POLITICAL
SPECTRUM,
FEEL THAT OUR REACTION TO THE WATERGATE
BREAK-IN WAS AN EXAMPLE OF AMERICAN SELF-FLAGELLATION.

4. FOLLOWING WATERGATE AND THE TRAGIC END TO U.S.
INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM, MANY OF THE MORE THOUGHTFUL
GERMAN OBSERVERS EXPRESSED DISMAY THAT GROWING MISTRUST

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BETWEEN CONGRESS AND THE EXECUTIVE WOULD MAKE IT DIFFI-

CULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, TO CONDUCT RATIONAL U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. AT FIRST, THOSE MOST CONCERNED WERE THE MORE CONSERVATIVELY INCLINED POLITICIANS IN ALL PARTIES. THEY FELT THAT AMERICA HAD BECOME MIXED IN SELF-DOUBTS JUST WHEN EUROPE NEEDED STRONG LEADERSHIP COMING FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC. IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER CAME TO THE DEFENSE OF THE U.S. IN AN ARTICLE IN THE "FRAHKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG" AND LASHED OUT AT CRITICS OF THE U.S. SINCE THEN THE CONCERN HAS SPREAD BEYOND THE CONSERVATIVES, FED IN PART BY THE DEFENSE DEBATE IN THE U.S. (PARTIC- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ULARLY THE CRITICISM OF U.S. DEFENSE POSTURE BY FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY SCHLESINGER).

5. CDU AND CSU POLITICIANS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, SUCH AS CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE KOHL AS WELL AS OTHER MINISTER PRESIDENTS, HAVE RAISED THEIR CONCERNS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS. POLITICAL ADVISERS AND POLITICIANS IN THE SPD/FDP COALITION HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED A FEELING OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHERE AMERICA IS HEADED. THE CONFUSION AND CONCERN ABOUT WHAT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE U.S. MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WESTERN ALLIANCE CROP UP IN CONVERSATIONS WITH WEST GERMAN POLITICIANS OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IN BONN AND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THE ANGRY REMARK MADE BY DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER ABOUT US CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS VIS-A-VIS TURKEY IS A GOOD INDICATION OF THE SENSE OF FRUSTRATION FELT BY EVEN OUR CLOSEST FRIENDS.

6. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO THINK THAT OUR FRIENDS HAVE LOST FAITH IN US. THIS IS NOT THE CASE. FOR EXAMPLE, HELMUT KOHL'S SPEECH FEB. 20 AT A CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY USIS AND THE KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG TOOK A POSITIVE APPROACH TO THE "FUTURE OF THE TRANS- ATLANTIC RELATIONS." KOHL COMMENTED ON THE PROBLEMS MENTIONED ABOVE, ELABORATED ON THE CONTINUED SOVIET THREAT AND CONCLUDED THAT TOGETHER WEST EUROPE AND THE U.S. COULD COME TO GRIPS WITH THE NEW CHALLENGES. THE FACT REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT UNDERCURRENT OF UNEASINESS BROUGHT ABOUT BY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE U.S. SUCH AN EROSION OF CONFIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES LEADERSHIP ROLE COULD HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR FRG POLICY AND ULTIMATELY, THEREFORE, FOR UNITED STATES INTERESTS.
HILLENBRAND

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